

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000321

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA, DRL/CRA; NSC FOR E.
MILLARD

PLEASE ALSO PASS TOPEC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02-26-14

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Campaigning begins in earnest as nomination
lists are finalized for April 2 election

Refs: Colombo 309, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of
Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The proverbial dust has settled on the nomination process for Sri Lanka's upcoming April 2 parliamentary elections, with nominations closing February 24. Campaigns by the two major parties have kicked off as of February 26, and the stage is set for the fourth national election in less than five years. Turning to news of the Tigers, the Norwegian Ambassador told Mission that the group is interested in the upcoming elections, and seemed calm during his February 25 trip to Kilinochchi in the north. END SUMMARY.

=====
Nomination process closes, campaigns kick off
=====

12. (C) The nomination process for Sri Lanka's upcoming April 2 parliamentary election closed on February 24, with nearly six thousand candidates from around the country vying for 196 electoral posts. Following the submission of nomination lists, campaigning has kicked off in earnest by the two major parties. President Kumaratunga's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) is set to begin their campaign with a large rally on February 26 in the north-central cultural town of Anuradhapura. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) is also poised to begin its campaign with customary verve, with a rally in Kandy on February 26, the central city where the UNP traditionally kicks off its campaigns. (The UNP also has put up campaign billboards in Colombo with a photo of the PM and President Bush at the White House.)

13. (C) Nominations were received from 22 electoral districts, with 24 parties and nearly two hundred independent groups submitting nominations lists. Sri Lanka has approximately 13 million voters, and voter turnout in the past has been around 70 percent. According to reports, this is the largest number of candidates fielded in Sri Lanka since the country's independence in 1948. Out of the 225 total seats in Sri Lanka's parliament, twenty-nine seats will be filled later from the "National List," the allotment of which will be fixed in the days immediately following the elections, as the allocation of these seats is determined on the national percentage of votes that each party wins.

=====
Breakdown of nominations
=====

14. (C) The PM's UNP party nominated 250 candidates. Notable among the nominations were that of Hindu Affairs Minister T. Maheswaran, who will be running from Colombo rather than from his home district of Jaffna in the north; and the addition to the National List of Navin Dissanayake from the hill district of Nuwara Eliya, and son of a former Prime Minister. Mission contacts have indicated that Dissanayake was placed on the National List so as to not split support in the Nuwara Eliya district in the center of the country for the Ceylon Worker's Congress (CWC), a tea estate Tamil party. Also on the UNP's National List was Ronnie de Mel, a senior MP most recently from the President's party, who left the UPFA on February 21 to rejoin the UNP.

15. (C) For its part, the President's UPFA also nominated 250 candidates in total, which included 39 individuals from the extremist Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), 211 individuals from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), several Muslims, and members of the Buddhist clergy. Notable on the UPFA's National List is Lakshman Kadirgamar, former Foreign Minister and a key presidential advisor who President Kumaratunga named Minister of Information and Media in early

February.

16. (C) Tamil Parties: Thus far, Tamil parties have nominated 33 candidates in the north and east of the country. Following attempts by members of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) to remove the group's liberal-minded leader V. Anandasangaree and considerable internal party discord, pro-LTTE members of the TULF will run under the symbol of the Tamil Federal Party, while Anandasangaree will run independently under the TULF banner in the northern district of Jaffna.

17. (C) Muslim and other parties: As previously reported, four Muslim MPs from the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) signed an agreement to support the President's party on February 22. In reaction to this move, Rauf Hakeem, head of the SLMC, signed an agreement with the UNP stating that the SLMC would support the PM's party in certain districts -- thus, the SLMC's nominations are rolled into the UNP's slate of nominees, except in Ampara District in the east, where Hakeem will be running under the SLMC banner. The SLMC also nominated 23 individuals to its National List. In developments regarding other parties, the extremist Sinhalese Buddhist Janatha Hela Urumaya (JHU) nominated a slate made up entirely of Buddhist clergy, a move that has drawn considerable criticism, including from prominent Buddhist monks. Also noteworthy among the nominations was the Jathika Janatha (National People's Party), an independent group, which nominated a slate of 23 women in the Colombo District.

=====
Tiger interest in elections
=====

18. (C) Turning to news of the Tigers, Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar met with Tiger political leader S.P. Thamilselvam on February 25, and called the DCM later that day to provide a readout of the meeting. Brattskar noted that the atmosphere in the northern town of Kilinochchi was "serene and calm." Brattskar said he had briefed the LTTE leadership on the co-chairs meeting in Washington, and noted that Thamilselvam was "in listening mode" during Brattskar's briefing. Brattskar also briefed the Tiger political chief on a World Bank-proposed mechanism for reconstruction aid to the north/east in which the LTTE, NGOs and the GSL could each put up development proposals to a World Bank Secretariat. Brattskar said Thamilselvam listened

SIPDIS
carefully to the proposal, asked a few questions and said he would seek guidance from Tiger leadership.

19. (C) Thamilselvam spoke at length about how the aspirations of the Tamil people should be "respected" in the coming election and told Brattskar that the LTTE would not hinder Tamils in their areas from voting, but was non-committal on whether elections could take place in LTTE-held territory. Thamilselvam expressed concern that the GSL would not let Tamils cross out of LTTE areas to vote. Brattskar told Thamilselvam he had seen no sign that this will happen (we agree, although there have been a few muddled press reports suggesting that it might). Brattskar commented to DCM that the LTTE interest in playing a role in the elections through the TNA is a positive sign and should be encouraged as part of an effort to make the LTTE see that peaceful political change is possible. Brattskar said the LTTE is "saying and doing the right things in the runup to the elections" which he finds "quite encouraging."

110. (C) COMMENT: With the nominations lists having been filed, the campaigning has begun in earnest. In an Unfortunately, reports continue to filter in of additional incidents of election-related violence. The Tigers seem to be interested in being involved in the political campaign in an open manner, and, on the whole, have been relatively quiet of late. END COMMENT.

111. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD